

**AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
ZONING SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
Town Room, Town Hall
Wednesday, June 29, 2011**

Members present: Bruce Carson, Rob Crowner, Jonathan O’Keeffe
Others present: Joan Burgess, Vincent O’Connor (briefly)
Staff present: Planning Director Jonathan Tucker, Senior Planner Christine Brestrup

Mr. O’Keeffe called the meeting to order at 5:07 p.m. He noted that the meeting was being recorded by Amherst Media, and that at 6:00 p.m. the consultant for the Gateway Corridor project would arrive to set up his equipment for the ensuing Planning Board meeting. The Subcommittee meeting should wrap up by 6:15 p.m.

Minutes – The minutes of the June 15 meeting and Zoning Forum were reviewed. Mr. Crowner MOVED to approve the minutes, Mr. Carson seconded, and the Motion passed unanimously, 3-0.

Zoning Forum Debriefing – Mr. O’Keeffe drew the attention of the members to the written summary of public comments made at the June 15 Zoning Forum. He said that those present appeared to be evenly split on how to approach the Development Modification amendment—between those who wanted no significant changes made to the Zoning Bylaw at this time, and those who thought that no further zoning progress should occur until Development Modification was resolved and adopted.

Mr. Crowner indicated his pleasure at the fact that every person present at the Forum had spoken.

FY12 Work Plan & Schedule – Mr. Tucker described the discussion draft of a proposed schedule for major zoning changes over the next three Town Meetings—Fall 2011, Spring 2012, and Fall 2012. Mr. Tucker also described the results of an informal analysis he had performed of the technical errors present in the Official Zoning Map, indicating that there were many such errors.

Mr. O’Keeffe said that he did not see fixing all of the vestigial ‘technical’ Zoning Map errors as a priority. They always involve property interests and as a result are hard-fought and time-consuming. He thought the Subcommittee should only take up those map errors which actively cause problems. He proposed that the Subcommittee undertake the conversion of the Official Zoning Map to digital GIS layer first, as soon as feasible.

Ms. Brestrup said she was comfortable with that, and explained at length the work that she and other Town staff had been doing analyzing the FPC District in the past two years, and its implications for the conversion to a digital Official Zoning Map.

Mr. O’Keeffe agreed with the approach she described, saying that the result of the converting the FPC District to a more accurate digital presentation should minimize any changes to the current zoning boundaries, and that real changes could follow completion of the analysis for which Town Meeting had just appropriated funds.

There was extended discussion of the technical aspects of this proposed change.

Mr. Tucker said that Planning and GIS staff could make a presentation to the Subcommittee at an upcoming meeting, to illustrate the challenges and opportunities with examples.

Mr. Crowner said that a presentation would be needed at the Planning Board public hearing for any Zoning amendment to change the Official Zoning Map to a digital base, to inform the Board and the public.

Mr. Tucker asked if the Subcommittee would like to try to bring that amendment to the Fall 2011 Special Town Meeting. He indicated that the actual amendment would be fairly simple. The complicated part was reassuring citizens that no real change was occurring in district boundaries as a result.

Mr. O’Keeffe said the amendment should come to the fall, and the other members agreed.

Mr. Tucker raised the issue of the numerous distinct neighborhoods in the R-G District, and the need to rezone the district to reflect those distinctions. Mr. Carson asked how that would be done—through overlay districts or a bunch of separate districts? Mr. Tucker replied that it would depend on what an analysis of the areas showed. He cited neighborhood zoning in Lowell, MA, as one example of how to approach the task.

Mr. Crowner asked the Subcommittee to look at and consider the regional plan, Valley Vision 3, including the Partnership Communities option. He thought it would usefully inform the Development Modification amendment. Mr. Tucker pointed out that the regional plan was incorporated by reference into the Master Plan and thus into the Zoning Bylaw.

There was discussion of Town initiatives to address local housing problems, including but not limited to student housing. Mr. Carson recommended that the Town present a summary of its efforts under Article 1 at the fall 2011 Special Town Meeting, so citizens would know what efforts were being undertaken. There was discussion of those efforts and general agreement with Mr. Carson’s recommendation.

Mr. Tucker left the meeting briefly.

Village Center Projects – Ms. Brestrup explained the timeline suggested by The Cecil Group for completion of the village center planning and rezoning projects. The schedule included a presentation of concept plans at the July 6 Zoning Subcommittee meeting. Mr. O’Keeffe asked that the next agenda include the presentation.

Mr. Crowner cited the need for a primer on form-based code. Ms. Brestrup said that Steve Cecil was scheduled to give a regional presentation on form-based code at Amherst Town Hall in the early fall. Opportunities to expand on public access to that presentation were discussed. Mr. Tucker noted that staff had also been collecting examples of such primers online and would make them available to the Subcommittee members for their review.

Mr. O’Keeffe said that an effort to explain form-based code should involve the Town Meeting Coordinating Committee (TMCC). Mr. Crowner said the TMCC wanted to do outreach on form-based code and the budget.

Master Plan Implementation – Mr. Tucker described the process for implementing the Master Plan as set out in the Plan itself, and in the ways the Planning Board and Subcommittee had been pursuing implementation. He referred to a handout summarizing zoning amendments since 2007.

There was discussion of whether or not the Planning Board should have a Master Plan Subcommittee, or whether a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) as described in the Plan itself should be pursued. Mr. O’Keeffe said that he saw MPIC as a committee on its own, and not a subcommittee of the Planning Board. There was more than zoning and permitting involved in implementation of the Master Plan.

Next Meetings – The Subcommittee decided to meet on July 6 and 20, and August 3, 17 and (possibly) 31.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director